

Setting the Stage for Letter Knowledge

Read About Print-Rich Classrooms

About Letter Walls

What is a letter wall?

The letter wall is a visual display of the alphabet with a key-word picture for each letter. It is used as an interactive tool to expose young children to a variety of concepts throughout the year. All words on the wall are accompanied by a picture.

Why should I use a letter wall?

Letter walls are used to help emergent readers and writers become aware of:

- Letter forms
- Letter names
- Basic letter-sound correspondences
- The idea that words can be written down
- The concept of words
- Beginning letters in familiar words

Letter walls also help enhance children's vocabulary development.

How does a letter wall differ from a word wall?

Word walls traditionally are used in higher grades to help children with reading, writing, and spelling activities. They usually include words with no pictures.

Where do I put the letter wall?

- Find a space large enough for the entire alphabet (2 lines are acceptable)
- Ideally, this space would be located in or near the circle time area
- This space should be accessible to children and at their eye level

Options

If there is a lack of wall space, some other options include:

- Portable boards such as science project boards, sewing/cutting boards, shower boards, etc.
- The back of shelves
- The space below chalkboards

How do I set up the letter wall?

- Use small cards which include the upper- and lowercase letter and a key-word icon.
- Arrange these in sequential order. If two rows are used, make sure to put A through M on the top row and N through Z on the bottom row. Leave room for 4 to 5 words under each letter.
- If possible, use Velcro strips under each letter to allow words to be easily added and removed.

How do I introduce the letter wall to the children?

- Tell the children that this is the alphabet and that the letters in the alphabet are the letters we use to read and write.
- During the first couple of weeks, read some simple ABC books such as "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom" and "Alphabet Under Construction." Also sing a variety of alphabet songs and use a pointer to point out the letters.

- Play games such as:
 - Having children point out letters they know.
 - Giving children a letter and having them match it to the letter wall.
 - Using a variety of pointers to have children point to letters on the wall.

What are the first words that I put on the letter wall?

- The first words that go on the letter wall should be the children's names. One way to make this more meaningful to children is to read an alphabet name book such as "From Anne to Zach."
- Next, tell the children that they are going to make their own class alphabet book. Put a letter on each page. Add the children's names and pictures under each corresponding letter. Leave the page blank if no names in the class begin with that letter. Read the book to the class.
- Next, make a name card for each child. This should have the first name only with each child's photo.
- Play a game. Call out the letters in sequential order. If someone has a name that begins with that letter, they put their name card under the letter. Make this fun and exciting! This could happen in one session or throughout the week.

What other words do I put on the letter wall?

Words chosen for the letter wall should be meaningful to the children.

Words could be chosen from:

- Read alouds
- Theme concepts
- Songs, rhymes, poems, etc.

Words could also include:

- Storybook characters
- Class pets
- Words children are interested in

***Note:** Words put on the letter wall must be illustrated. This provides support and meaning for the child. High-frequency words should not be included unless they can be illustrated.

Things to consider when making word cards:

- Use lowercase letters on word cards (except for proper nouns).
- The size print that you use depends on the space available. If your space is large, you may use a sentence strip piece. If the space is small, you may want to use a part of the sentence strip cut in half long wise.
- Using consistent-sized print will help children as they develop word concepts and print awareness.
- The word should be written first followed by a picture.
- Pictures may be drawn, found in magazines, or downloaded from the Internet.

How long should words remain on the letter wall?

- Keep names up all year (if space allows)
- Give children plenty of time to interact with words before taking them down
- If themes last for an extended time (3–4 weeks), words may be changed with the theme

- Avoid letting the letter wall get cluttered

What do I do with the words I take down from the letter wall?

- Put the words into a book. Words may be used to make a theme book (Our Farm Book), a letter book (Our M Book), or an alphabet book (Our A-Z Book).
- Books may be placed in the library center, the writing center, etc.
- Words may be placed in a word file in the writing center.
- Words may be used to make a game.

When do I use the letter wall?

Letter walls:

- Should be used daily
- Can be used in a large group, a small group, and/or centers

Remember!!

- If children are not interacting and involved with the letter wall, it becomes a decoration
- Children will only learn from the letter wall if it is meaningful to them
- Children's interest will be sparked when new games and activities are introduced
- Make the games and activities fun, playful, short, and interactive